

## **By Our Roots, We Know Each Other**

By: Frances Orton

I have heard it said, *“We may think there is of little interest or importance in what we personally say or do—but it is remarkable how many of our families, as we pass on down the line, are interested in all that we do and all that we say. Each of us is important to those who are near and dear to us—and as our posterity read of our life’s experiences, they, too, will come to know and love us. And in that glorious day when our families are together in the eternities, we will already be acquainted.”* (in Conference Report, Oct. 1979, 5; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 5).

That is one reason these reunions are so important. We become acquainted with our family. We are a family of diversity. I have been attending these reunions since I was 11 years old.

When I was a little girl, I was very proud of my thick blond hair. I would go to Anson Call Family Reunions from my mom’s side and everyone would say how pretty my hair was and that the blond color comes from the Calls. Then as I grew it turned into what I thought was a weird color brown. I didn’t like it too much. Then one year I attended a family reunion in this very place – Kirtland, Ohio. During this reunion my Aunt Eleanor brought a simple pieced fabric pouch belonging to Mary Duty Smith, the grandmother of Joseph, Hyrum, Katherine, William, Samuel, and Lucy Smith. This pocket pouch was removed and hung on the bedpost when she passed away in her early nineties, May 27, 1836. At that same reunion was a lock of Hyrum’s hair that Mary Fielding clipped off after the Martyrdom. When I looked at Hyrum’s hair it was the exact color of mine. I felt my hair had become special again. I could see myself in one of my ancestors and I wanted to become strong.

Speaking of color of hair, when I was young, I told my family and friends I was not going to marry a red head. This created an interesting situation when I met Steve. After we had been dating quite a while Steve heard this and gave me a different perspective on this subject. He said, “My hair is not red – it is orange.” I guess that made the difference.

As we learn of our ancestor’s life’s experiences, we understand we can do hard things. When Steve and I got married we moved some distance from any family while we were in school. Steve let me finish college before he started school. In the middle of my senior year, I went into labor early because I can’t carry the weight of the baby. Our first child only lived for one hour. We held him until the mortician picked up our son and took him from us. I remember this as a hard and lonely time. I didn’t feel I had anywhere to go and no one could change anything.

Then I reflected on things I had learned in my studies and from attending these family reunions. Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith lost two children as babies. This doesn’t count those who died in maturity before Lucy passed away. I did find comfort in what Joseph Jr. saw in this very temple as stated in Section 137 of the Doctrine and Covenants *21 January 1836*, Joseph saw,

“1. The heavens were opened upon us, and I beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof, whether in the body or out I cannot tell.

2. I saw the transcendent beauty of the gate through which the heirs of that kingdom will enter, which was like unto circling flames of fire;
3. Also the blazing throne of God, whereon was seated the Father and the Son.
4. I saw the beautiful streets of that kingdom, which had the appearance of being paved with gold.
5. I saw Father Adam and Abraham; and my father and my mother; my brother Alvin, that has long since slept;
6. And marveled how it was that he had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom, seeing that he had departed this life before the Lord had set his hand to gather Israel the second time, and had not been baptized for the remission of sins.
7. Thus came the voice of the Lord unto me, saying: All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God;
8. Also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who would have received it with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom;
9. For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts.
10. And I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven.”

I knew what I was feeling had been experienced by so many who came before me and by many of you. Knowing family has shared hard times and moved forward to make a difference in this world is a blessed thing. Joseph Smith once said, “I have a father, brothers, children, and friends who have gone to a world of spirits. They are only absent for a moment. They are in the spirit, and we shall soon meet again. The time will soon arrive when the trumpet shall sound. When we depart, we shall hail our mothers, fathers, friends, and all whom we love, who have fallen asleep in Jesus. There will be no fear of mobs, persecutions, or malicious lawsuits and arrests; but it will be an eternity of felicity.” (*History of the Church*, 6:302-3, 310-11, 315-16; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on April 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richard, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.)

A couple years ago as we began planning this reunion, I had a desire to honor little Joseph (Murdock) Smith with some type of memorial. He doesn't have any marker. Little Joseph and Julia were born on May 1, 1831. Shortly after that Joseph and Emma lost their twins and adopted Joseph and Julia on May 10, 1831 after their Murdock mother had died in childbirth. Later, Little Joseph who had been sick died from exposure 5 days after the mob tarred and feathered Joseph Smith Jr. Little Joseph is buried

somewhere in Hiram in an unmarked grave. Our hope is our family will someday find where he is buried so we can do a proper memorial.

Our desire for a memorial and the inability to place one without knowledge of where little Joseph is buried led to this year's lilac bush project. The Lilac bush has always been a special plant to Joseph Smith Sr. The journal of Samuel H Smith's daughter, Mary Bailey Norman, gives an account of Father Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith's grave being buried at the lilac bush. It was also mentioned that Samuel and Mary Bailey Smith are at the two smaller ones. Mary Bailey Norman said, "Joseph, Hyrum, and Samuel put the lilac bush that Father Smith loved so well at the head of his grave."

We remodeled our home which left an old lilac bush right where we were putting our driveway. The contractors arrived with large equipment to put in a new sewer line. The lilac was right in the way. They were just going to dig out the bush and discard it, but I asked if they could just move it to the side of our house. They gladly consented. We were able to save this lilac bush which blooms around Mothers' Day with a beautiful fragrance. The bush is in the right place for our home. It's beautiful. Sometimes we all wonder if we're in the wrong place. During the close of this reunion, let me assure you that we are where we should be. Ask the Master Gardner where he wants you planted. Ask him where your heart should be.

This year Gilda Sundeen suggested we honor of all our loved ones who have gone before us by planting a lilac. We have planted several lilac bushes in their memory. One *bush* cutting was planted in Winter Quarters with the help of Omaha Bob Smith "*that descends from a lilac bush that grew at Jerusha and Hyrum Smith's home in Kirtland, Ohio. As Hyrum's family moved first to Missouri, then to Nauvoo, cuttings from the bush went with them to the Salt Lake Valley, and they have been nurtured for more than 150 years by descendants. This start was taken from her bush that is now at This is the Place Heritage Park.*

In the Pioneer Trail Campground, we planted two bushes. One bush has been cared for by Joseph and Emma's family that originates from the family cemetery in Nauvoo. The other bush came from the bush cared for from Hyrum's family. A history of these lilacs will be put together and posted at a later time.

We were also given permission to plant a lilac by the grave memorial of Mary Duty Smith, little Mary Smith, and Joseph and Emma's twins. This has given us a chance to appreciate the faith of our ancestors. Our cousin M. Russell Ballard has said, "*We are all bound together— Our journey is different, but the trail we must follow is the same. It is the trail of faith, and if we keep our feet firmly planted on that trail, we will be just as successful in facing our challenges and trials in conquering the wilderness of worldly things as our ... ancestors were in facing theirs.*"

*"We are the inheritors of a tremendous heritage. Now it is our privilege and responsibility to be part of the Restoration's continuing drama, and there are great and heroic stories of faith to be written in our day. It will require every bit of our strength, wisdom, and energy to overcome the obstacles that will confront us. But even that will not be enough. We will learn, as did our ..ancestors, that it is only in faith—real faith, whole-souled, tested, and tried—that we will find safety and confidence as we walk our own perilous pathways through life."*

*“Real faith, our anchor in the storm, born of the Spirit, affects our actions and our attitudes. When we truly believe, we ask not “What do I have to do?” but rather “What more can I do?” When we truly believe, and when that belief is confirmed upon our souls by the Holy Spirit, faith becomes a causative force in our lives, driving every thought, word, and deed heavenward. That's what it means to walk with “faith in every footstep.” It was so for our... ancestors, and it must be so for us today.” - Elder M. Russell Ballard, When Thou Art Converted*

Like the lilacs our roots are deep and strong. Like the lilacs whose shoots have been taken and planted elsewhere we have been planted in various locations across the world. But we stem from the same great root of Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith, the host family of the restoration. Let us all examine why these ancestors are of such importance to us. Why do we feel such a draw to them? Our hearts are turned to them. I am certain that their hearts are turned to us and I am certain they would like our hearts turned towards each other.

We are part of a wonderful family. I am sure our family on the other side of the veil is with us today and they are happy we are gathered together. Their examples show us that the reasons behind our choices matter. And each of us individually is in charge of determining what those reasons are. We each have a great potential that we were born with. Every one of us was given by our Heavenly Father wonderful capacity to do good in the world. May we all have the courage to allow the love of God to govern the thoughts and desires of our hearts. By doing this we honor those who have gone before us and given so much.

I want to thank my family and all of you for making this reunion happen. We can participate in family history by sharing stories about our lives and the lives of our ancestors. This will give us a desire to be better. I would like to end by reminding each of us, “The measure of a man is not what he gets from his ancestors – it’s what he leaves his posterity.”